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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 003344

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: KADUNA GOVERNOR BLAMES RECENT VIOLENCE ON
RADICAL MUSLIMS AND OUTSIDE AGITATORS

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5 (B)
AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a December 11 meeting with International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Deputy Assistant Secretary Steven Schrage and Ambassador Jeter, Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi discussed the late November violence in Kaduna. Makarfi blamed the riots on pro-sharia Islamic groups and agitators from outside Kaduna. He acknowledged that religious tensions acted as kindling; however, he said the motivations of those who actually lit the fire were "purely political". Later, in a private conversation with Ambassador Jeter, Makarfi laid much of the blame at the feet of Vice President Atiku and National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed. Makarfi said that in their attempts to embarrass President Obasanjo and undermine his popularity the two political heavyweights had unleashed forces they could not control. Finally, while the governor praised the military for its handling of the incident, he had no kind words for the Nigerian National Police (NNP) and other civilian security agencies. Were it not for their inept handling of the situation, said Makarfi, the violence might well have been averted. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a December 11 meeting with INL DAS Schrage and Ambassador Jeter, Kaduna State governor Makarfi discussed the late November violence in Kaduna. Ambassador emphasized that Kaduna, with its ethnically and religiously diverse population, had the potential to be an example for the rest of Nigeria if incidences of civil unrest could be minimized. Makarfi acknowledged that rising tension between Kaduna's Christian and Muslim populations was of grave concern, but he thought the root of the problem was politics, not religion.

3. (C) Makarfi said the unrest had nothing to do with the many peaceful Muslim processions taking place in Kaduna. The violence began when members of radical Islamic groups, collectively known as Izala, incited the crowds to act. Emphasizing that the riots were planned, Makarfi noted that there many of those arrested claimed they were paid to attack the "This Day" newspaper office or to burn the governor's shopping plaza. He also claimed that the evening before the riots began, he had heard reports of people dropping tires in strategic locations around Kaduna so they would be available to be burned the next day. Makarfi was astounded that neither the Nigerian police nor the intelligence service was able to pick up these signs of impending trouble.

4. (C) Makarfi specifically noted the pernicious influence of the "Supreme Council for Sharia Law". The governor accused this group of helping to incite the riots in order to hasten the introduction of sharia law into Kaduna State. Makarfi said this group would be the likely source of future problems for him and Kaduna because of the governor's disdain for sharia law. Noting that the Muslim community is sharply divided between radicals and moderates, Makarfi said he would work to remove the influence of this group from Kaduna and vowed to support those that would join him in the fight. He said this would be a showdown and he welcomed it.

5. (C) Later, in a private conversation with the Ambassador, Makarfi further emphasized the political nature of the violence by placing much of the blame on Vice President Atiku Abubakar and National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed. Makarfi accused the VP and NSA of fomenting violence in Katsina, Nasarawa, and Benue in addition to Kaduna. The governor allowed that the VP and NSA may have only wanted to cause minor unrest in order to embarrass and weaken President Obasanjo. Unfortunately, said Makarfi, the duo let loose forces that they could not control. When asked what the USG might be able to do help the situation, Makarfi suggested that the USG speak with the VP and NSA and demand that they desist.

16. (C) While Makarfi gave the military good marks for its handling of the crisis, his review of the NNP's performance was scathing. Makarfi characterized them as being uncoordinated, untrained and undisciplined. He said the police had failed miserably during the riots and that the Police Commissioner admitted as much to him personally. The governor noted that despite rumors that something was in the offing and his personal order to increase local security measures, the police did nothing to prepare themselves for the violence that would take place in Kaduna. Makarfi said that when the situation finally deteriorated to the point at which the military requested permission to deploy, he had to overrule the Nigerian National Police which had said military intervention was unnecessary.

17. (C) Clearly exacerbated by the NNP's performance, Makarfi suggested scrapping the organization all together. He felt that most police functions could be better carried out by local police forces. He advocated the creation of a "National Guard" made up of retired military personnel that would be available to act in cases of large-scale unrest.

18. (C) When the Ambassador and Makarfi's conversation turned toward the upcoming national elections, Makarfi said the international community should pressure Obasanjo not to run for a second term for the good of the country. Makarfi thought the North could accept another southerner as long as he is not Obasanjo or another Yorba. When the Ambassador told Makarfi that he had heard VP Atiku had decided to stay with the President, Makarfi changed his tack slightly, saying Obasanjo had a chance to win the North if he reconciled with Atiku.

19. (C) Makarfi thought Ibrahim Babangida's support of the candidacy of former Vice President Alex Ekwueme was a ploy to win the presidency for IBB in 2007. Makarfi reasoned that if Ekwueme were to win the South-zoned presidency, he would not run for a second term. That would leave the door open for IBB to run when the office is zoned to the North in 2007.

110. (C) COMMENT: While Makarfi's allegations about the VP's and NSA's roles in fomenting sectarian violence are disturbing, it is important to keep in mind the source of the information. Makarfi and Atiku have long been competitors. Indeed, many saw Makarfi as Atiku's likely replacement if Obasanjo dropped the VP. It is possible that political animosity may have influenced Makarfi's search for the cause of unrest in his state. END COMMENT.
JETER